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Defense Estimative Brief

China's ICBM Force Begins to Take Shape (U)

Summary

Since initial deployments in the mid-1960s, China's strategic missile force has provided Beijing with primarily a regional strike capability. Through the early 1980s the ultimate shape of a future intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force remained unclear.

Although economic and strategic considerations have led to some missile program modifications, Beijing remains committed to deploying a small, but significant, number of ICBMs.

-- Given China's reliance on a strategy of minimal deterrence, the number of CSS-4s probably will not exceed some 20 launchers through the early 1990s.

The CSS-4 will remain the only Chinese missile capable of threatening the continental United States.

The uncertainties about actual Chinese force levels which will continue to plague both the US and the USSR could take on greater prominence in future US-Soviet arms talks. Citing the large arsenals of the superpowers, Beijing will stress the irrelevance of its small strategic forces to any arms control agreements.

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Discussion

1. [REDACTED] Background. Since initial deployments in the mid-1960s, China's strategic missile force has provided Beijing with primarily a regional strike capability. Even during this early period, however, development programs for longer-range systems were well underway.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Current Trends.

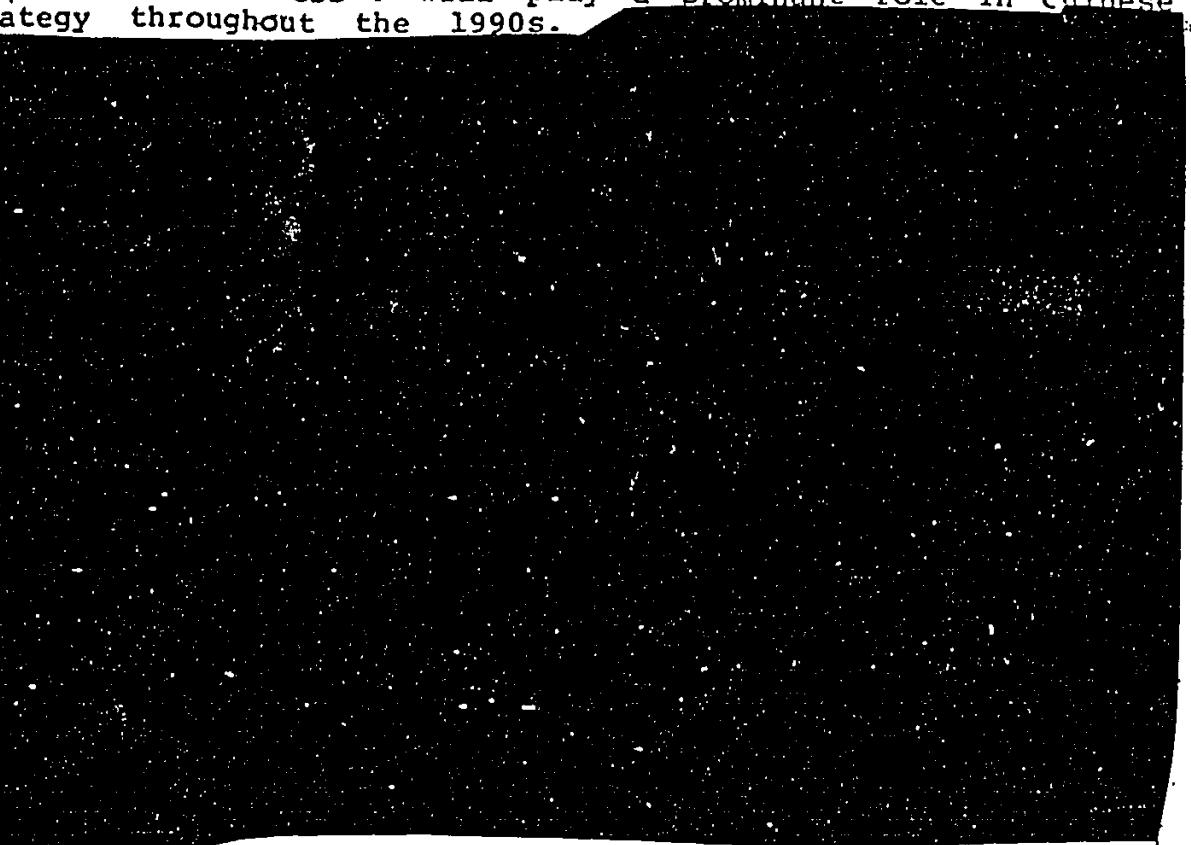
Economic and strategic considerations have resulted in some program modifications, most notably a stretching out of plans for SSBN construction. Nevertheless, Beijing remains committed to developing a diversified missile force, including a small, but significant ICBM capability.

[REDACTED]

4. [REDACTED] Future Forces. During the next ten years China's intermediate-range missile force will be marked by qualitative rather than quantitative growth. As new solid-propellant missiles enter the field older cryogenic systems will be phased out. In the late-1980s some numerical growth in the strategic missile force will occur as a small, but significant, number of ICBMs enter the inventory. These longer-range systems will occupy an increasing proportion of the missile force, as shown in the table below.

5. [REDACTED] We believe that China will continue to pursue a strategy of minimal deterrence relying on deployment of relatively small numbers of missiles with extensive use of mobility and CC&D to increase survivability.

6. [REDACTED] The CSS-4 will play a prominent role in Chinese strategy throughout the 1990s.



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